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CALFED Bay-Delta Program

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January 26, 2000

Mr. Steven R. Ritchie
Acting Executive Director
CALFED Bay-Delta Program
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1155
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Steve:

A copy of your letter to Curt Schmutte, Chief of Flood Protection and Geographic Information Branch of the Department of Water Resources dated January 6, 2000, was recently circulated at a meeting of the Delta Levees and Habitat Advisory Committee. The letter in question deals with reconstruction and repair of the Suisun Marsh levees bordering Honker Bay.

I have two concerns about the letter which I want to express to you.

The first is that the information that you appear to be relying upon to reach your conclusion had not been presented to the Levees and Channels Technical Team at the time you wrote the letter. Although that Team had been following the technical investigation of Suisun March levees, the specific information which formed the apparent basis of your conclusion expressed in your letter had only been presented to a subcommittee and not to the Team itself.

Yesterday the additional investigation results were presented to the Levees and Channels Technical Team. As I understood that presentation, certain conclusions can be reached based upon that technical investigation:

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■ The modeling indicates that narrow breaches in the Suisun Marsh levees at different locations, while increasing salinity in the vicinity of the breaches, would have the apparent effect of dampening the tidal prism further upstream and actually reducing the excursion of salty water into the Delta during the drought scenarios being modeled.

■ Wide breaches in Suisun March levees would have the opposite impact upon the Delta (increasing salinity).

■ There is the possibility that breaches away from the most active channels in the Suisun March have less chance of "trapping" saline waters which may be present in the Suisun March during drought events. The modeling of this result, however, is incomplete. The one-dimensional model used by DWR in its investigation does not work without making modifications which are inconsistent with the locations which are remote from the active channels, and the two-dimensional model employed by RMA (DWR's consultant) has not yet been used to model the more remote locations.

Based on this presentation, I don't believe the conclusions expressed in the last two sentences in the second paragraph of your letter are correct.

The second concern deals with the most effective use of the limited funding which has been available for levee work. Delta interests have fought long and hard to establish a cost-sharing program with the state government for the maintenance and rehabilitation of Delta levees. This program has been in effect for enough time to demonstrate the reduction in catastrophic levee failures which result from a better financed program, notwithstanding the fact that the program has scarcely ever been funded at the levels anticipated in the enabling legislation. This is an on-going problem. Until an expanded funding source is made available for the program, the most effective use of the limited funds available is to continue to reduce catastrophic flooding in the Delta which has potentially deleterious impacts upon water quality, the environment, and recreation to an extent which may not result from levee failures in the Suisun Marsh unless left unrepaired for extended periods.

There is an implication in your letter to Mr. Schmutte, probably unintended, that CALFED would like to see the available levee repair and rehabilitation funding utilized on the Suisun Marsh levee bordering Honker Bay. The Levees and Channels Technical Team has been dealing with prioritizing available monies, especially for the so-called "special projects." Before any encouragement, whether explicit or implicit, is given to expend available funds on Suisun Marsh levees, it is essential that this prioritizing process be completed to insure that the inadequate funding made available is spent on the most important projects.

Yours very truly,



THOMAS M. ZUCKERMAN

TMZ:csf

cc: Curt Schmutte
Margit Aramburu
Dan Nomellini
Chris Neudeck
Gilbert Cosio
Gil LaBrie
Bob Clark
John Herrick